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SEPT

REVENGE ON THE BLACK RIVER

WESTERMARCK-- KING CONAN'S BLACK DRAGONS ACT AS SCOUTS FOR THE ARMY MARCHING TO RELIEVE THE BLACK RIVER FORTRESS. BUT RELIEF HAS COME TOO LATE FOR THE DEFENDERS OF THE FORTRESS...

MITRA! THE STENCH! SHOULD WE START TO BURY THEM BEFORE THE MAIN COLUMN ARRIVES?

THERE'S NO TIME, LEONIDAS. OUR TASK IS TO FIND THE POSITION OF THE PICTS AND INFORM THE KING.

STORY
DON KRAAR
PENCILS
MIKE DOCHERTY
INKS
GEOF ISHERWOOD
LETTERS
JANICE CHIANG
COVER
MIKE KALUTA
COLORS
GEORGE ROUSSOS
EDITOR
LARRY HAMA

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KEEP YOUR WITS ABOUT YOU, THE PICTS LIKE TO ATTACK WITHOUT WARNING.

YOU'VE SAID ENOUGH, TARQUIN.

I HAVEN'T SAID HALF ENOUGH IF YOU HAVEN'T LISTENED TO ME, LEONIDAS.

I'LL THANK YOU TO MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS, TARQUIN.

THE WELFARE OF THE BLACK DRAGONS *IS* MY BUSINESS. YOUR AFFAIR WITH THE PRINCESS RADEGUND THREATENS TO DISHONOR US ALL.

RADEGUND AND I WILL BE MARRIED. WAIT AND SEE.

KING CONAN WILL HAVE YOUR HEAD ON A PIKE BEFORE HE HAS YOU AS A SON-IN-LAW, LEONIDAS.

LISTEN...

IT LOOKS AS IF THE PICTS HAVE FOUND US!

TAKE COVER!

WE'RE CAUGHT IN THE OPEN!

MAKE FOR THE HIGH GROUND!

THEY'VE GOT US WITH OUR BACKS TO THE RIVER!

THERE'S NO ESCAPE!

THEN SELL YOUR LIFE FOR THE HIGHEST PRICE YOUR BLADE CAN REAP!

COME CLOSER AND LEARN WHY THE BLACK DRAGONS ARE KING CONAN'S ELITE, YOU PICTISH SCUM!

AGH!

AGH!

AGHEE...

MITRA IS WAITING FOR YOU, PICTISH DOG!

UGH... MITRA...

AGH...

COME ON, THERE'S STILL ONE BLACK DRAGON LEFT STANDING... ONE LEFT TO CLEAVE YOUR SOULS FROM YOUR BODIES!

UGH...

NO MORE VICTIMS FOR YOUR BLADE, AQUILONIAN!

Rodegund...

A FEW HOURS LATER...

...TARQUIN, HROLF...

...LEONIDAS...

...AKU...

...PEPIN...

...SYAN-LIN...

...ALL MY BLACK DRAGONS...

...MASSACRED BY THE PICTS.

YOU'LL NOT GO UNAVENGED. I SWEAR IT BY CROM.

HAVE YOU NO JESTS FOR US, RUFIO?

THE BLOOD OF BRAVE MEN ALWAYS DAMPENS LAUGHTER, MY LIEGE.

BURY THEM BEFORE THE MAIN COLUMN ARRIVES. THE SIGHT OF SLAIN COMRADES CAN ROB EVEN THE MOST VALIANT OF THEIR FIGHTING SPIRIT.

PALLANTIDES, RIDE FOR TARANTIA. TELL THEM WE MUST HAVE FRESH SUPPLIES WITHIN A MONTH.

AYE, MY LIEGE.

AND TELL TROCERO AND PUBLIUS THAT THEY HAVE A FREE HAND TO DEAL WITH DEXITHEUS AND CRASSUS IF THEY TALK ANY MORE ABOUT AN INQUISITION FOR THE FOLLOWERS OF ASURA.

WITH PLEASURE, MY KING.

PALLANTIDES, THE PRINCESS RADEGUND MUST BE TOLD OF LEONIDAS' FATE.

AYE, WOULD THAT THE DUTY HAD FALLEN TO SOMEONE OTHER THAN MYSELF.

BE GENTLE, AFTER ALL, THEY THOUGHT THEIR LOVE WAS A SECRET FROM US.

THE PRINCESS RADEGUND IS YOUNG. LOVE MAY COME TO HER AGAIN.

COME NOW, WON'T ONE OF YOU BRAVE SOLDIERS LEND HIS STRONG BACK TO A WORTHY CAUSE?

IT WILL ONLY TAKE A MOMENT AND YOU WON'T FIND US UNGRATEFUL.

I'LL HAVE ANY MAN FLOGGED WHO BREAKS RANKS!

OUR LABOR IS NOT FOR THE LIKES OF YOU, GLISANDE.

THAT'S NOT WHAT YOU SAID THE OTHER NIGHT, SOLDIER, WHEN YOU PROMISED TO LOVE ME FOREVER.

TELL ME, MY KING, SINCE WHEN IT IS A FLOGGING OFFENSE TO SHOW A LITTLE CHIVALRY TO A CAMP FOLLOWER?

WHAT'S YOUR NAME, GIRL?

GLISANDE, BUT FOR A FEW SILVER COINS, I'LL ANSWER TO ANY NAME YOU PLEASE, YOUR MAJESTY.

REPAIR THE GIRL'S CART! CAN'T YOU SEE A WOMAN LIKE THAT'S A VALUABLE ASSET, BY CROM!

AYE, MY LIEGE.

CALL THE MAPMAKERS AND ENGINEERS TO MY TENT. I HAVE WORK FOR THEM.

AA-MY KING, IF YOU SHOULD NEED ANYTHING--ANYTHING AT ALL FROM US, YOU HAVE ONLY TO ASK.

DON'T GIVE ME ANY MORE EXCUSES, MAPMAKER!

YOU'LL HAVE AN ARMED ESCORT WHILE YOU COMPLETE YOUR WORK--ONLY HAVE IT COMPLETED WITHIN A MONTH.

YES, OH KING, WE HEAR AND OBEY.

GOOD! AND SEE THAT IT'S DONE WELL IF YOU WANT TO KEEP YOUR HEADS ON YOUR SHOULDERS!

MY LIEGE, I'LL RETURN WITHIN A MONTH.

WE'LL BE EXPECTING YOU, PALLANTIDES. NOW MAKE HASTE.

KING CONAN, THE FORTRESS IS DAMAGED BEYOND REPAIR. WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE US DO?

THAT SHOULD BE OBVIOUS, ENGINEER.

TEAR IT DOWN AND REBUILD IT!

AT COURT IN TARANTIA...

I'VE TOLD YOU BEFORE THAT THE SHORTAGE OF FOOD IN THE CITY IS THE WORK OF THE ASURANS.

DEXITHEUS, I HAVE NO AUTHORITY TO ALLOW YOU TO CONVENE AN INQUISITION.

MOST CERTAINLY.

WELL, PALLANTIDES, WHAT NEWS FROM WESTERMARCK?

THE KING HAS SPOKEN, DEXITHEUS, IF ONLY YOU AND CRASSUS WILL LISTEN TO REASON.

NOT WHEN YOU REFUSE TO HEAR THE TRUTH, TROCERO.

AMONG OTHER THINGS, THE KING SAID YOU HAVE A FREE HAND TO DEAL WITH THESE PRIESTS IF THEY CONTINUE TO TALK OF AN INQUISITION.

PURGE THE FOLLOWERS OF ASURA AND YOU'LL DISCOVER WHERE THEY ARE HOARDING FOOD.

YOU HAVE NO PROOF, DEXITHEUS.

I HAVE THE PROOF THAT MITRA HAS PUT IN MY HEART. YOU WILL PAY FOR YOUR FOLLY! COME, CRASSUS.

YES, MASTER...

THE OLDER DEXITHEUS GETS, THE MORE INTOLERANT HE BECOMES.

I'M CERTAIN IT'S CRASSUS' INFLUENCE.

HE IS RIGHT ABOUT ONE THING THE SHORTAGE OF FOOD IN TARANTIA IS CRITICAL.

I NEED SUPPLIES FOR THE KING'S ARMY WITHIN A MONTH.

THAT WILL BE NO SIMPLE TASK, PALLANT DES.

BUT WE'LL RANSACK THE LAST OF THE [illegible] HOUSES TO FEED THE KING'S ARMY IF NEED BE

IN PRINCESS RACEGUND'S QUARTERS WITHIN THE PALACE ..

FORGIVE ME FOR INTRUDING, MY PRINCESS BUT I MUST HAVE A WORD WITH YOU

PALLANTIDES I'D KNOW YOUR VOICE ANYWHERE COME IN YOU ARE WELCOME

WHAT IS IT THAT YOU FIND SO HARD TO SAY? THAT YOU KNOW OF MY LOVE FOR LEONIDAS?

THAT AND MORE MY PRINCESS

WOULD THAT MY TONGUE HAD BEEN CUT OUT BEFORE I EVER HAD TO SPEAK SUCH WORDS

NO! HE'S NOT.

YES MY PRINCESS

LEONIDAS AND ALL THE BLACK DRAGONS.

NO!

NO, NO, NO!

HE WAS A SOLDIER HE ALWAYS KNEW THE FATE THAT MIGHT BE H.Y

BALLANTIDES, I BEG YOU, WHAT HAS HAPPENED?

MY QUEEN THE BLACK DRAGONS MET THEIR FATE ON THE BLACK RIVER ALL OF THEM.

LEONIDAS!

OH, MOTHER, I LOVED HIM... I LOVED HIM!

YES, MY CHILD, YES...

BY ASTEROTH I'D RATHER FACE A HORDE OF PICTS UNARMED THAN TELL A WOMAN THAT THE MAN SHE LOVES WILL NEVER RETURN.

OH, MITRA! HELP ME! MY HEART HAS BEEN TORN OUT!

YOU'RE ONLY SIXTEEN RADEGUND THERE WILL BE OTHER LOVES IN YOUR LIFE, EVEN IF NONE IS EVER AS SWEET AS THE FIRST.

WINTERNIGHT, THE BLACK RIVER FORTRESS

PALLANTIDES, YOU'VE BE TURNED IN GOOD TIME.

YOU'VE MADE [illegible] THE FURTHERS MY LIEGE

TREXERY AND [illegible] THE STOREHOUSES IN TARANT A TO SURELY US, MY KING.

THEN WE'LL HAVE TO MAKE [illegible] AM [illegible] COME, YOU'RE IN TIME FOR A COUNCIL OF WAR AND YOU'LL SEE WHAT I MEAN

OUR MAPMAKERS [illegible] TOUTALLANTIDES.

WELL, WHAT SAY YOU, HAGAN? DOES YOUR AESIRIAN LEGION HAVE A TASTE FOR BATTLE?

A TASTE? WE'RE STARVING FOR IT! SHOW US OUR TASK AND I'LL MARCH MY AESIRIANS FROM HERE TO VALHALLA, IF YOU BUT SAY THE WORD

THE PICTISH HORDE HAS CROSSED TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BLACK RIVER. I HAVE NO INTENTION OF PURSUING THEM AND FIGHTING THEM ON THEIR HOME GROUND.

NO. I WANT THEM TO COME TO US SO WE CAN FIGHT THEM ON OPEN GROUND- HERE

TO DO THAT, WE'LL HAVE TO MAKE IT LOOK EASY FOR THEM. SO, WE'LL BREAK CAMP, MARCH BACK TOWARD TARANTIA, AND THEN DIVIDE OUR FORCES FOR A TRAP.

THE ENGINEERS WILL REMAIN HERE TO REBUILD THE FORTRESS, ALONG WITH A TOKEN FORCE AND THE CAMP FOLLOWERS TO HELP BAIT THE TRAP.

BALAN, YOU AND FAMOS WILL LEAD THE AESIRIAN AND CIMMERIAN LEGIONS NORTHWEST AS IF YOU WERE MARCHING FOR HOME

KUAGA, YOUR KUSHITE LEGION WILL JOIN SERVIUS GALLANUS' LEGION AND MARCH SOUTHEAST.

I WILL TAKE TWO LEGIONS AND MARCH DUE EAST

THEN ALL OF OUR TROOPS WILL DOUBLE BACK AND BE IN POSITION AT DAWN THREE DAYS FROM NOW.

WHEN THE PICTS ATTACK THE FORTRESS, AS THEY SURELY WILL.

WE WILL STRIKE SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM THREE DIRECTIONS

IT WILL BE THE JOB OF THE MERCENARY LEGIONS TO CUT OFF THE PICTS' ESCAPE ROUTE ACROSS THE BLACK RIVER.

PALLANTIDES, YOU WILL COMMAND THE TOKEN FORCE THAT WILL GUARD THE FORTRESS

SOON WE'LL SMASH SKOOZONJ AND HIS PICTS - IF NOT FOREVER, THEN FOR AT LEAST ONE GENERATION, AND I'LL SEND SKOOZONJ'S HEAD N SACK BACK TO HIS PEOPLE AS A WARNING

THE PRICE OF GRAIN HAS TRIPLED WITHIN A WEEK FORTUNATELY, WE HAVE A SCAPEGOAT.

AT THIS RATE, THE PEOPLE WILL BE NEARLY TOO HUNGRY TO FOLLOW US IN THE STREETS.

WELL, OUR LEADER WAS RIGHT THERE IS MUCH TO BE GAINED IN PUTTING ASIDE OUR COMPETITION AND JOINING FORCES

OUR PLAN WILL LEAD US TO THE UNDERMINING OF THE HUMANS AXE

I'LL HEAR NO TALK OF HEADSMEN OR EXECUTIONS FOR US WE'LL SAVE THAT FOR CONAN AND HIS FAMILY.

AYE, COUNT BARTHOLD, YOU KNOW WE LONG FOR THE DAY WHEN YOU SIT UPON THE THRONE OF AQUILONIA.

STILL YOU MUST ADMIT 'TIS A DESPERATE GAME WE PLAY.

AYE, A DESPERATE GAME INDEED FOR DESPERATE STAKES BUT I'VE WAITED TOO LONG TO SEIZE MY BIRTHRIGHT

JUST REMEMBER THAT YOU'D NEVER SUCCEED IN WRESTING THE CROWN WITHOUT US, COUNT BARTHOLD.

I WILL REMEMBER YOUR SUPPORT WHEN I SIT UPON THE THRONE, BARON ENDORE.

I JUST HOPE YOU REMEMBER WHO THE LEADER OF THIS CONSPIRACY REALLY IS.

YES, COUNT BARTHOLD, REMEMBER WHO YOUR LEADER IS AND WHO YOU TAKE YOUR ORDERS FROM.

THAT WOULD BE GOOD ADVICE FOR ALL OF YOU.

YES, CRASSUS, YOUR WILL IS OUR LAW.

THERE WILL BE NO MORE TALK OF SEIZING THE THRONE UNTIL...

KING XANTAUS OF ARGOS LEADS THE ARMIES OF ARGOS OPHIR AND NEMEDIA TO THE GATES OF TARANTIA

THEN WHEN THE PEOPLE ARE STARVING IN THE STREETS AND CRYING OUT FOR THE BLOOD OF THE ASUKANS WE WILL ASSASSINATE CONAN'S FAMILY.

AND THEN, COUNT RANTHOLD, IF YOU'RE VERY GOOD AND DO AS YOU'RE TOLD WE'LL LET YOU BE KING.

THEY'RE LEAVING. MY CHIEF THERE'S ONLY A SMALL FORCE NOW TO DEFEND THE FORTRESS.

SO CONAN'S GROWN TIRED OF THE GAME AND HE'S GOING HOME. HE'S LUST HIS STOMACH FOR WAR WITH OLD AGE.

BUT SHOOT DINT HAS N' TI... TH'S STOMACH FOR WAR

I FT CONAN GET AWAY HE ... BE BACK

LET THE AQUILONIANS RETURN TO LITTLE WESTERMARCK WE'LL SLAUGHTER THEM AS NEVER BEFORE

LET THEM REBUILD THEIR FORTRESS AND WE'LL BURN IT AGAIN

THEN KING CONAN WILL RETURN AND CHASE US INTO THE FORESTS WE KNOW SO WELL THAT'S WHEN WE'LL TURN ON HIM AND [illegible] FOREVER

NOW WE [illegible] MIGHT BE IN [illegible] DOWN TWO DAYS FROM NOW

LOOK FOR MY SIGNAL ON THE ROCKY CRAG OVERLOOKING THE PLAIN.

REMEMBER, THREE FLAMING ARROWS FIRED IN QUICK SUCCESSION.

BEFORE DAWN AT THE FORDS OF THE BLACK RIVER.

EAMON, WE'D BEST SEND WORD TO GALLANNUS AND KUAGA THAT WE ARE IN POSITION AND WE'VE CUT OFF THE PICTS' ESCAPE ROUTE. I'M SURE THEY KNOW BY NOW THAT THE PICTISH HORDE HAS CROSSED TO THIS SIDE OF THE RIVER.

NOTHIN
MY GENERAL
JUST THE FIRST
LIGHT OF DAY
BREAKING

NO WORD
FROM CIMMERIAN
AN HAGAN,
KUAGA

THEY'LL
SEND WORD
GALANNUS. YOU
MAY DEPEND
ON IT.

IS ANYTHING
VISIBLE ON THE
ENEMY SOLDIERS?

MY GENERALS,
EAMON THE CIMMERIAN
AND

WE HAVE CUT
OFF THEIR EAST
ROUTE ACROSS THE
BLACKWATER

THEN CONVEY OUR
COMPLIMENTS TO
EAMON AND HAGAN AND
TELL THEM WE HAVE
ONLY TO AWAIT THE
KING'S SIGNAL

DAWN .

CONAN, MY KING, IF SHOOZ DINJ WAS GOING TO ATTACK HE WOULD HAVE ATTACKED BY NOW.

WAIT AND SEE, PROSPERO. I KNOW SHOOZ DINJ AND HE WON'T WASTE AN OPPORTUNITY LIKE THIS.

A TOKEN GARRISON AT AN UNFINISHED FORTRESS IS TOO EASY A PRIZE NOT TO TAKE.

AYE, IF PALLANTIDES CAN HOLD OUT UNTIL WE SPRING THE TRAP

WELL, GLISANDE, THERE MIGHT HAVE BEEN MORE PROFIT FOR YOU IF YOU'D GONE WITH THE KING'S TROOPS.

KING CONAN WANTED US HERE I TRUST HE HAD A REASON

AYE. THERE IS THAT'S WHY THE GARRISON STANDS ARMED AND READY.

READY FOR THE PICTS, PALLANTIDES? IS ANYONE EVER READY FOR THEM?

AAYHEEEE!

TAKE COVER, GIRL!

WE'RE AS READY AS WE'LL EVER BE

YAHEEAHAHEE...

TO ARMS! THE PICTS ARE UPON US!

STEP LIVELY, MEN! THERE'S WORK TO BE DONE!

HOLD HOLD WAIT UNTIL I GIVE THE WORD

SHOOZ DINJ HAS TAKEN THE BAIT.

WAIT I WANT ALL THE PICTS IN THE OPEN BEFORE WE ATTACK.

STAND READY, BOWMAN

WAIT UNTIL SHOOZ DINJ COMMITS HIS RESERVES.

NOW!

NOW, SERVIUS GALLANNUS' CAVALRY MOVES IN FROM THE SOUTH...

COME, YOU PICTISH DOGS AND TASTE AQUILONIAN STEEL!

PIT YOUR FIGHTING SKILL AGAINST KUSHITE FURY, PICT!

AND FROM THE NORTH

NOW, YOU SONS OF THE NORTH, WREAK HAVOC!

FROM THE EAST.

FORWARD! THE DAY IS OURS!

NOW, AQUILONIANS, AVENGE YOUR MURDERED COUNTRYMEN!

CROM, LEAD ME TO SHOOZ DINJ!

PICT, YOU DIE TOO EASILY!

SOUND RECALL! WE HAVE THE SURVIVORS SURROUNDED...

AND A HOST OF ENEMIES SLAIN.

MY LIEGE, THIS PICTISH CHIEFTAIN SPEAKS FOR THE REST OF THEM THEY WISH TO SUE FOR PEACE AND MERCY.

SO, YOU! PICTISH VERMIN HAVE LEARNED SOMETHING FROM CIVILIZED MEN ..

IT'S TIME TO MAKE PEACE WITH THEM THERE WILL BE OTHER DAYS TO MAKE WAR.

HOW TO BEG FOR YOUR LIVES

WE WILL RETREAT BEYOND THE BLACK RIVER, NEVER TO RETURN, O K.NG

A GOOD OFFER

NOW I LL G VE YOU MY BEST OFFER.

GO BACK TO YOUR WARRIORS AND TELL THEM TO SING THEIR DEATH SONG

ANNIHILATE THEM!

FIND HIM! BRING HIS BODY TO THE KING! WE MUST FIND SHOOZ DINJ!

YOU'VE WON A GREAT VICTORY EVEN WITHOUT CAPTURING DARKLON--WHAT'D I'M I'M AT ANY RATE--NOW WHERE'S YOU'VE PUT HIM AMONG THE DEAD EVEN IF HE IS HERE?

IT'S BEEN TWENTY YEARS SINCE I'VE SEEN A MAN DIE!

BUT I'LL KNOW HIM, BY HIM

FIND HIM, I SAID!

FIND HIM! I'VE WON NOTHING!

MEANWHILE AT COURT IN TARANTIA, A COURIER ARRIVES FROM AQUILONIA'S EASTERN BORDER

PLEASE RADEGUND I UNDERSTAND HOW YOU FEEL BETTER THAN YOU KNOW BUT YOUR PLACE IS HERE WITH US AT COURT.

OUR MOTHER IS RIGHT RADEGUND RUNNING AWAY FROM LIFE IS NO CURE FOR GRIEF

MY QUEEN, FORGIVE ME, BUT MY BUSINESS IS URGENT!

YOU HAVE OUR LEAVE TO SPEAK, SOLDIER

MY QUEEN. .

... INVADERS HAVE SWEPT OVER OUR EASTERN BORDERS! OUR ARMY IS IN RETREAT!

THE ARMIES OF NEMEDIA, OPHIR AND ARGOS ARE UNITED UNDER THE COMMAND OF KING XANTAGS OF ARGOS.

KEEP NOTHING FROM ME.

THEY ARE WITHIN A FEW DAYS MARCH OF THE CITY, MY QUEEN.

TROCERO, WE MUST PREPARE FOR A LONG SIEGE.

AND WE MUST GET WORD TO MY FATHER.

MITRA. .

YOU REALIZE THAT THE GARRISON IS UNDER STRENGTH AND THAT THE CITY IS ON THE BRINK OF STARVATION.

MITRA, AQUILONIA IS IN DANGER.

MY FATHER FACES DEATH IN HIS WAR AGAINST THE PICTS.

BUT, ALL I CAN FEEL IS THE WOUND IN MY HEART.

OH BLESSED MITRA, GIVE ME STRENGTH LEONIDAS IS GONE AND I CANNOT BEAR THIS LIFE ANYMORE.

ACCEPT MY DEATH BY MY OWN HAND, MITRA, OR GIVE ME SOME REASON TO LIVE.

MITRA HAS HEARD YOUR PRAYER, RADEGUND.

OH, CRASSUS...

YES, MY CHILD, MITRA KNOWS AND UNDERSTANDS MITRA HAS A PURPOSE FOR YOUR LIFE.

PLEASE, CRASSUS, HELP ME!

WESTERMARCK · CONAN'S CAMP ON THE BLACK RIVER

CONAN, MY KING, I HAVE GREAT NEWS!

THEN COME IN AND GIVE IT TO ME, PROSPERO.

WE FOUND HIM HIDING IN THE FOREST. WHEN WE BROUGHT HIM INTO CAMP THE PICTISH PRISONERS RECOGNIZED HIM.

I'D KNOW YOU IF IT HAD BEEN ETERNITY, CONAN NOW YOU MAY SEND WORD TO MY PEOPLE TO RANSOM ME

PROSPERO, YOU REMEMBER WHAT I SAID?

AYE, MY LIEGE

AND SO DO I. HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN, TWENTY FIVE YEARS - SHOOZ DINJ?

RANSOM IS FOR CIVILIZED MEN, SHOOZ DINJ NOT FOR SAVAGES AND BARBARIANS LIKE YOU AND ME.

BUT, BY CROM, I'M GOING TO MAKE YOU MY BEST OFFER.

COME, SHOOZ DINJ, DON'T BE OVERWHELMED.

IT'S NO MORE THAN YOU WOULD HAVE DONE FOR ME.

THE DIFFERENCE IS THAT I AM WILLING TO DO IT QUICKLY

MAKE CERTAIN THE PRISONERS WATCH THIS

...DOUBT.

I DON'T WANT THERE TO BE ANY .

GO ON TAKE IT BACK TO YOUR PEOPLE AND SHOW IT TO THEM

THAT'S WHY I'M SPARING YOU THE SAME FATE AWAITS ANY PICT THAT CROSSES THE BLACK RIVER

OUR WORK IS DONE HERE. WE BREAK CAMP IN THE MORNING

TARANTIA, THE DEFEATED AQUILONIAN ARMY RETREATS WITHIN THE WALLS OF THE CITY.

HOLD THOSE HORSES BACK OR YOU'LL TRAMPLE THE WOUNDED!

LOOK, THE ENEMY WILL HAVE THE CITY COMPLETELY SURROUNDED IN A FEW HOURS!

TELL ME, TROCERO, HOW LONG CAN WE HOLD OUT? I WANT THE TRUTH

PERHAPS TWO WEEKS. PERHAPS THREE. MY QUEEN

IT WOULD TAKE MY FATHER THAT LONG TO RAISE THE ARMY FROM WESTERMARK EVEN IF THEY MADE A FORCED MARCH

HE WOULD HAVE TO BREAK OFF HIS CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE PICTS.

WE CAN ONLY HOPE THAT ONE OF THE THREE COURIERS WE DISPATCHED WILL REACH THE KING.

A LITTLE HOPE IS BETTER THAN NONE.

TELL ME, DEX THEW, CAN YOU INFORM ME HOW OUR EMPTY FOOD STOREHOUSES OR PUT ANOTHER COIN ON THE PARAPETS?

MY FRIEND, I WILL SAY CONSTANTLY FOR OUR PERSEVERANCE I CAN FIND NO MORE THAN THE FOUNDATION OF A HOPE

CLOSE THE GATES!

BOOM

TAKE US WITHIN AN ARROW'S FLIGHT OF THE WALLS, CHARIOTEER! I WANT THEM TO HEAR MY WORDS.

AYE KING XANTAUS

I AM XANTAUS, KING OF ARGOS.

I AM COUNT TROCERO, REGENT FOR KING CONAN. SPEAK!

TROCERO, YOU DISPATCHED THREE COURIERS TO CARRY WORD TO CONAN.

THEY HAVE RETURNED.

YOUR CITY IS SURROUNDED. I DEMAND YOUR UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER OR EVERY LIVING SOUL IN TARANTIA WILL BE PUT TO THE SWORD.

KEEP YOUR THREATS FOR THOSE THAT FEAR THEM, XANTAUS, AND WE'LL HOLD TARANTIA 'TIL CRACK OF DOOM.

HADRATHUS... TELL ME CAN YOUR GOD, ASURA, SAVE US?

ASURA CAN ONLY SHOW MAN THE MEANS TO SAVE HIMSELF, MY PRINCE.

THERE IS A WAY OUT OF THE CITY KNOWN ONLY TO THE FOLLOWERS OF ASURA.

ONE DETERMINED MAN COULD ESCAPE TO CARRY WORD TO THE KING.

DEEP BENEATH THE STREETS OF TARANTIA, WHERE RAINWATER AND SEWAGE EMPTY INTO THE KHOROTAS RIVER...

THERE, MY PRINCE...

...THE ENEMY WILL NOT SEE YOU NOW THAT THE SUN IS SETTING.

YOU'VE DONE WELL, HADRATHUS.

BE CAREFUL, THE CURRENT IS SWIFT AND TREACHEROUS, BUT IF YOU ALLOW IT TO CARRY YOU DOWNSTREAM...

...IT IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE FOR A STRONG SWIMMER TO REACH THE FAR SIDE.

LOOK AFTER MY MOTHER AND SISTER, HADRATHUS.

YOU MAY DEPEND ON IT, MY PRINCE.

TELL YOUR FATHER WE PRAY TO ASURA FOR HIS SPEEDY RETURN.

CONTINUED IN ISSUE #31
FORCE OF ARMS

KING CONAN

℅ MARVEL COMICS GROUP
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New York, New York 10016

LARRY HAMA
EDITOR
PAT REDDING
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Attention correspondents: if you don't want your full address printed, please be sure to tell us so!

Dear Friends,

I am writing this in regards to your recent rendering of CONAN THE KING re-uniting with the rambling red-haired wench Sonja. My thanks to one and all. Conan the King has been constantly on the upswing with each passing issue, but this latest tale was indeed a true masterpiece. The opening scenes in the rowdy barroom with Conan in his bearded disguise rang especially true to life. In fact, the entire story had a feel of authenticity to it. The beard was a nice touch. Have Conan grow one and keep it. It gives him the appearance of being his actual age of fifty years plus, unlike when he is clean-shaven.

The artwork, as usual, was superb. The splash page of Sonja was very eye pleasing, but the highlight of the issue was the sequence with Conan diving into the water after Sonja and, not being able to resist the temptation of the beautiful, bouncing bottom bobbing ahead of him, reaches out for a quick feel. Sonja's resulting kick in the chops and hands-off-or-lose-them glare was definitely in character.

The fight with the Kushite guards aboard the death-barge was another enjoyable eyefull. The bottom panel on page 26, with the gut-sliced first Kushite guard quivering in pain while Conan is sent flying from the blow of the second guard, was very effective.

Artwork aside, the tale itself, of Conan giving in to his heart and following the temptress Sonja on a devil-may-care, to-heck-with-the-consequences quest was one any aging adventurer could identify with. Same goes for the anti-climax with Conan again shouldering his responsibilities and returning to his court for his kid's birthday bash.

As I stated at the start, CONAN THE KING is constantly growing. Keep it up. In its relatively short run of twenty eight issues, it has already by-passed its companion mag CONAN THE BARBARIAN, which has been stagnant since the death of Belit, way back in ish #100.

Looking to the future, I would like to see more tales of the Black Dragons, either in support of Conan or in solo back-up features. Also, don't let Prince Conn and his adventures among the samurai lie dormant. It is too good an idea to end up in comic limbo. A back-up in the lagging CONAN THE BARBARIAN or a bi-monthly of his own, the Prince definitely deserves.

And just one more bit before I put my pen up. The concept of Conan's illegitimate son brought forth the idea of what if another son was busy adventuring down along the black coast? A half-breed warrior bred from Conan's wandering days among the jungle tribes. He could even have been raised by Zula (remember him?), one of the most original sword-and-sorcery characters to hit on the comic scene. The tales of Conan's various offspring could easily fill a separate title. Keep the master Howard creation growing. CONAN THE KING is a fine start Till the next time I am motivated to write, I remain one of the faithful.

Mike Sodin
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Oaklawn, IL 60453

Dear People,

For quite some time now I've come to appreciate the genuine artistic talents of Marc Silvestri and Geof Isherwood; so much so in fact that I've come to consider them the ultimate Conan artists. I can hear the shouts of anger even now: "Blasphemy! Burn him at the stake! What about Smith? Now that guy really knew how to draw Conan!" Well, what about Smith? Granted, Smith was (is) an excellent artist, I'll not argue the fact. However, one need only open an issue of CONAN THE KING to fully appreciate that one artist need not be compared to another. This is not to slight Smith (or any other who had the [mis]fortune to follow in his shoes), far be it for me to state thus; however, I feel I must give Silvestri and Isherwood credit, for they had a big job ahead of them and they've managed to do it with an artistic flair of excellence of their own. I bow to these two gentlemen, and wish that they never tire, nor their pens run dry.

Now to get to the crux of this letter: the reuniting of Conan and Sonja. Finally, after lo these many years, these two people have finally crossed paths once again. This event has been waited for for too long a time, and I, for one, would like to congratulate everyone involved.

Conan showed a side of himself that has rarely been portrayed: that of a man in love. Usually he treates women with little more than a passing interest, one as easily discarded as a torn shirt. Okay, as always, there are those exceptions to the rule: Bêlit was one, and Zenobia is another. And yes, I suppose he does love (or loved) them both; however, I feel compelled to point out that, by his own actions, he tends to give evidence that he loves Sonja considerably more. Why else would he act like a lovesick youth? Never has he shown such childish mannerisms before, and I daresay, he'll never display them again. Who else but Sonja could have made him act thusly so? Zenobia? Hardly. There is but one explanation: Sonja is his true love. She is the dark secret buried deep within his breast.

The ultimate question now raises its ugly head: Would Conan betray his marriage vows? Would he casually toss aside his wife's trust of him? Yes, upon studying his actions in issue #28, I tend to think he would have, though with no one else but Sonja. She was (is) the one thing from his past (and now present) that he could not overwhelm, and for that very reason, she will forever remain that bitter enigma of his haunted dreams. To put it bluntly, had Sonja not tricked him, I'm sure he would have attempted to rectify his past mistakes. Not that he would have succeeded, for knowing Sonja, Conan would have had his hands full at best. However, the question of doubt remains, as well it should, unanswered.

R.J. Van Santen
629 Elmhurst Rd.
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada, R3R 0V2

Dear Marvel,

I knew today was going to be a super day when I got both SSOC and CONAN THE KING #28 through the mail. Then when I read #28, well, all I can say is it doesn't get *any* better than this. I felt so, so old and sad. Really choked up. I just loved it. I've been reading CTK since #17 and it just keeps getting better. However, #26 just tops them all. I don't know how you can improve on perfection but you guys always find a way.

Oh, I also noticed the price just went up, too. Well, it's worth every penny!

Susan Attai
Astoria, NY 11103

Thanks, Susan. It makes *our* days when we get letters like yours. And, speaking of improving on perfectio, that's exactly what Jim Shooter, Al Milgrom and Steve Leialoha have committed themselves to doing on this year's super-sequel, *SECRET WARS II*. Obviously, this is a project that's very near and dear to all involved, being as it is the continuation of the ultimate Marvel epic. The challenge they face — *topping* last years opus, SECRET WARS I — is incredible, but believe us — Jim, Al, and Steve are *determined* not to settle for anything less!

Men of Marvel,

Conan the King #28 provided me with an enjoyable escape into the world of my favorite barbarian. I had just finished reading SSOC #111 and in Swords and Scrolls one of my fellows was lamenting the infrequent appearance of Conan's female sidekicks. When lo . . . my favorite, the flame-tressed Red Sonja pops up in Conan the King. She was as wild as she was when she and Conan swiped the tiara in Makkalet.

One small word to the wise, gentlemen. The Red S's beautiful eyes are the deep green of an emerald and not sky blue. Your lives won't be worth two coppers if the Lady herself finds out your mistake.

Ryan Laughlin
Fountain Valley, CA

Whoops! Look, Ryan, we'll make a deal with you — we won't tell Red if you won't. After all, it's sorta hard to type when both your arms have been cut off!

Dear Marvel,

Holy Crom. I just picked up my first issue of CONAN THE KING #28. The art and the story was fantastic. With Red Sonja in it, it has to be perfect. I hope that Red Sonja will be back in future issues of CONAN THE KING. So I'm going to start collecting CONAN THE KING to see if Red Sonja will be back. I'm impressed, Marvel, because of this series.

Paul Mitacek
Astoria, NY

NEXT: FORCE OF ARMS!

BULLPEN BULLETINS

Thursday, March 14, Morrie Kuramoto died at age 64. He was a letterer and production man here at Marvel for so long that he was often called "the Ancient One." I was asked to speak at his Memorial Service. This is what I said:

I'm here representing the people Morrie worked with. I'm certainly not the best representative — there were others who knew him longer and better than I, but . . . I'm the biggest, I guess, so . . .

I knew Morrie well enough to know that he wouldn't want us to be so sad. As a matter of fact, it's been suggested that this ceremony should have been held at the OTB (Off-Track Betting) office.

I've been hearing other people speak about what a sweetheart Morrie was. Well, I'd like to add to that, that he was a crusty, stubborn, tough old coot who gave new meaning to the world curmudgeon. He was no pushover. And tough? When we had the transit strike a few years back, he walked to work from Astoria, Queens.

But he was a gentleman, too, in all senses of the word.

Morrie probably helped more people get started in our business than anyone else. New guys were routinely sent to Morrie for advice. He was a great teacher. He even taught me paste-up and production back in 1969.

Excuse me . . . I'm having trouble getting through this . . . but, hey, I cry at weddings on TV.

You know, Morrie wasn't rich, but if wealth were judged by how many people care about you, and how much they care, he would have been a billionaire.

Well, at least Morrie won't be losing any more races . . . the OTB's are going to miss him . . .

And so are we.

MORRIE KURAMOTO
(SELF-CARICATURE)

Jim Shooter
Editor in Chief

HYPE BOX

SQUADRON SUPREME (Limited Series) #1 — Hyperion! Nighthawk! Princess Power! They form the nucleus of the greatest super-team of their earth! But their world has suffered an unprecedented disaster, and now it teeters on the brink of total anarchy! Civilization's last hope is the Squadron Supreme, but will even their combined super-powers be enough? Find out in this *double-sized* premiere issue written by MARK GRUENWALD, penciled by BOB HALL and inked by JOHN BEATTY! It's the most incredible 12-issue series you'll read!

SOLOMON KANE (Limited Series) #1 — ROBERT E. HOWARD's swashbuckling Puritan returns to Marvel Comics! This *double-sized* issue features the adaptation of the classic "Red Shadows," in which our 16th Century hero battles the forces of voodoo and sorcery in darkest Africa! This 6-issue series is written by RALPH MACCHIO, with art by BRET BLEVINS!

LONGSHOT (Limited Series) #1 — Marvel's newest super hero sensation is an interdimensional alien who has just popped up on Earth! But nobody knows just who he is or why he's here . . . including Longshot himself! Don't miss this 6-issue series of Marvel magic, brought to you by ANN NOCENTI (writer), BILL ANDERSON and WILLIAM PORTACIO (inkers), and introducing the penciling wizardry of ART ADAMS!

GRAPHIC NOVEL #16: THE ALADDIN EFFECT — Holly-Ann Ember is just one little girl. How can she possibly save her town from the overwhelming forces of A.I.M. all by herself? She can't! But with the help of She-Hulk, Tigra, Wasp and Storm, she might have a chance . . . unless they're all destroyed by A.I.M.'s most awesome threat ever! You dare not miss this battle royale plotted by SHOOTER, scripted by MICHELINIE, penciled by LAROCQUE and inked by COLLETTA!

CHECKLIST

- ☐ **THE THING #27**
- ☐ **DAREDEVIL #222**
- ☐ **NEW MUTANTS #31**
- ☐ **WEB OF SPIDER-MAN #6** — Secret Wars II cross-over!
- ☐ **CLOAK AND DAGGER #1** — Their own regular bi-monthly series at last!
- ☐ **GARGOYLE (Limited Series) #4** — The thrilling finale!
- ☐ **RAWHIDE KID (Limited Series) #2**
- ☐ **SQUADRON SUPREME (Limited Series) #1** — See Hype Box!
- ☐ **CONAN THE KING #30**
- ☐ **THE LIFE OF CAPTAIN MARVEL (Limited Series) #2** — Reprinting JIM STARLIN'S classic epic!
- ☐ **AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #268** — Secret Wars II cross-over!
- ☐ **CAPTAIN AMERICA #309**
- ☐ **POWER PACK #14**
- ☐ **MICRONAUTS #12**
- ☐ **ALPHA FLIGHT #26**
- ☐ **INDIANA JONES #31**
- ☐ **DAZZLER #39**
- ☐ **LONGSHOT (Limited Series) #1** — See Hype Box!
- ☐ **INCREDIBLE HULK #311**
- ☐ **AVENGERS #259**
- ☐ **CONAN THE BARBARIAN #174**
- ☐ **MARVEL TALES #177** — Reprinting "The End of the Green Goblin," by STAN LEE and JOHN ROMITA, from *Amazing Spider-Man #40*.
- ☐ **X-MEN #197**
- ☐ **ROM #70**
- ☐ **MOON KNIGHT #3**
- ☐ **POWER MAN / IRON FIST #119**
- ☐ **G.I. JOE #39**
- ☐ **SOLOMON KANE (Limited Series) #1** — See Hype Box!
- ☐ **WEB OF SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL #1** — Introducing "Futuremax," by ANN NOCENTI and TONY SALMONS!
- ☐ **FANTASTIC FOUR #282** — A Secret Wars II tie-in!
- ☐ **IRON MAN #198**
- ☐ **PETER PARKER, THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN #106**
- ☐ **DEFENDERS #147** — With special guest star, Sergeant Fury!
- ☐ **STAR WARS #99**
- ☐ **THOR #359**
- ☐ **SECRET WARS II (Limited Series) #3** — The saga of the Beyonder on Earth continues, by SHOOTER / MILGROM / LEIALOHA!
- ☐ **TRANSFORMERS #8**
- ☐ **THE OFFICIAL MARVEL INDEX TO THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #6** — Find out about everything that happened in *Amazing Spider-Man #138-155!*
- ☐ **DOCTOR WHO #12**

MARVEL MAGAZINES

- ☐ **SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #115**
- ☐ **MARVEL AGE #30**
- ☐ **MARVEL FANFARE #22** — Iron Man vs. Dr. Octopus, written by McKENZIE and *painted* by STEACY!

EPIC COMICS

- ☐ **DREADSTAR AND COMPANY #3**
- ☐ **MOONSHADOW #3**
- ☐ **SWORDS OF THE SWASHBUCKLERS #2**
- ☐ **GROO THE WANDERER #7**
- ☐ **BLACK DRAGON #3**
- ☐ **THE ONE #1** — The story of the ultimate super hero, by RICK VEITCH! See how "The One" came into existence after a near-nuclear holocaust strikes down most of the human race!
- ☐ **TIME SPIRITS #5**
- ☐ **ELFQUEST #2**
- ☐ **COYOTE #13**
- ☐ **EPIC ILLUSTRATED #31** — The conclusion of "Cobalt 60" by BODE and TODD, plus more tales by MUTH, HEMPEL, BYRNE, GOODWIN, and the European sensation, VICTOR DELA FUENTE!

STAR COMICS

- ☐ **PLANET TERRY #6**
- ☐ **PETER PORKER, THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-HAM #3** — Introducing the invincible Iron Mouse!
- ☐ **WALLY THE WIZARD #6**
- ☐ **ROYAL ROY #3**
- ☐ **MUPPET BABIES #3** — Presenting "Kermit and the Beanstalk!"
- ☐ **GETALONG GANG #3** — Featuring the monsters of Mystery Mountain!

GRAPHIC NOVEL

- ☐ **GN #16: THE ALADDIN EFFECT** — See Hype Box!